

# Coins and Membership Tokens of the Heaven and Earth Society

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(Plates 20-1)

LIKE any secret society a Chinese secret society is made up of people who have come together with a common interest who do not want non-members to know what they are doing, either because they are vulnerable and have formed a society for self-protection and self-help, or because their activities are suspicious or illegal. In order to keep a society secret loyalty is of the utmost importance, and often a symbolic code develops by which members are instantly recognizable to each other. In Chinese secret societies coins and paper money have played an important role in the symbolic code.

In China the tradition of secret societies is closely linked with peasant uprisings and rebellions, and the majority of members belonging to a secret society would have had minimal education and would be largely illiterate. However, they would all think of themselves as Chinese and would share the popular culture of China: a mixture of popular religion, Buddhism, Daoism local gods, mythology and traditional historical tales. They would also be well aware of the Chinese concept of 'the Mandate of Heaven' or the divine right to rule. They would know that a weak dynasty was often replaced as the result of a peasant rebellion. The emperor who held the Mandate of Heaven was thought to stand between heaven and earth and to connect the two. The inscription on Chinese cash coins usually included the name of the imperial reign period, and when rebels rose against the imperial authority they were

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1 Mao Zedong in 1926. in his analysis of all the classes of Chinese society, affirmed that the principals of the secret societies were the rural vagrants: 'The *yu-min* [rural vagrants or *e'le'ments de'classe's*) consist of peasants who have lost all opportunity of employment as a result of oppression and exploitation by the imperialists, the militarists and the landlords, or as a result of floods and droughts. They can be divided into soldiers, bandits, robbers, beggars and prostitutes ... But to the extent that they must all earn their livelihood and cook rice to eat. they me all one ... They have secret organizations in various places: for instance, the Triad Society in Fukien and Kwangtung; the Ko-lao-hui in Hunan. Hupei, Kweichow and Szechuan; the Big Sword Society in Anhwei, Hunan and Shantung; the Society of Morality in Chihli and the three north-eastern provinces; the Green Gang in Shanghai and elsewhere, These serve as their mutual aid societies in the political and economic struggle...' See S. Schram. 'Mao Tse-tung and secret societies', *China Quarterly* July-Sept. 1966. p. 4.

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often quick to issue coins with an inscription relating to their own cause. This can be seen in the coins of the Ming rebels, the coins of the Taiping rebels and the coins of the secret societies. A number of the secret societies issued membership tokens in the form of coins and banknotes, which were not intended for circulation. The rebels' choice of using a money form may in itself symbolize their aspiration to hold the Mandate of Heaven in their own name.

The most successful attempt to oust the weakening Qing dynasty was the Taiping Rebellion in the 1850s, which lasted over a decade until its final defeat by combined Chinese and Western forces in 1861. The leader of this rebellion was Hong Xiuquan (1814-64), who had dreamt that he was the second son of God and the younger brother of Jesus Christ, and who saw it as his duty, or mandate, to save China. He led troops from his home in the southwest of China northwards to Nanjing where in 1853 he installed himself as the Heavenly King in the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, and began to issue coins with the inscription *Taiping shengbao* (sacred treasure of the Taipings). In addition to their battles with the imperial army the Taipings were able to compound the worsening economic situation by cutting off supplies from the southwest, which was the main source of metal for casting the imperial cash coins.

Although the Taiping Rebellion started as a secret society the rebels were keen to show that their new dynasty was above board, had a solid constitution and regulations, and denied any involvement with the growing numbers of secret societies.<sup>2</sup> For the secret societies the opposite was true. For them the Taiping Rebellion was an inspiration, and they were keen to claim the support of the Taiping rebels in their own cause to restore the Ming dynasty and put a truly Chinese emperor on the throne. By encouraging people to associate them with the Taiping rebels the secret societies were able to increase their own membership under the Taiping aegis and assume a stronger, more threatening power.

<sup>2</sup> The original Taiping organization had been the Society of God Worshippers (Bai Shangdi Hui) founded by Hong Xiuquan and his friend Feng Yunshan in the 1840s, after Hong had received a set of Liang A-fa's *Quanshi liangyan* (Good words to exhort the age) containing long quotes from the Bible. In 1847 he went to Guangzhou to study the Bible under Issachar J. Roberts, an American Baptist missionary. See P. A. Kuhn, 'The Taiping rebellion', *Cambridge History of China*, vol. 10, part I (Cambridge, 1978), pp. 267, 271 ~ It is interesting to note that the Treaty of Nanjing in 1842 granted toleration to Christian missionaries and their converts, and the Treaty of Tianjin in 1860 went further in granting protection to them. See M. L. Wynne, *Triad and Tabut. A Survey of the Origin and Diffusion of 'Chinese and Mohammedan Secret Societies in the Malay Peninsula, AD 1800-1935* (Singapore, 1941), p. 53, See also C. A. Curwen, 'Taiping relations with secret societies and with other rebels', in Jean Chesneaux (ed.), *Popular Movements and Secret Societies in China 1840-1950* (Stanford, 1972), p. 74, where Curwen writes that only one official Taiping document, issued in January 1852, mentions the Triads, and 'thereafter in no official Taiping publication now extant can any mention be found of either secret society influence upon the Taipings or of relations between the two groups in any period'.

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This credible association is clearly seen on the coins and money-shaped membership tokens of the secret societies.

This paper looks at the coins and money-shaped membership tokens issued by secret societies in the south and east of China at the time of the Taiping Rebellion and shortly after. These societies were branches of the larger umbrella organization, the Heaven and Earth Society (*Tiandi hui*). Traditionally, the Heaven and Earth Society is thought to have been founded during the Kangxi reign period (1662-1722) when there is known to have been persecution of religious groups. The earliest known record of the Society is found in a provincial governor's report of 1789 which refers to the Buddhist monk, Wan Tixi, setting up the Heaven and Earth Society in Zhangpu County in Fujian province in 1761.<sup>3</sup> There are also numerous legends about the origins of the Society, the most common being that soon after the establishment of the Qing dynasty in 1644, the Buddhist monks at the Shaolin monastery offered their support in an important battle. In gratitude for their assistance the monastery was granted special privileges by the Emperor, but eventually Qing officials grew suspicious and attacked the monastery killing all but five monks, who managed to escape. The five monks founded the Heaven and Earth Society, and set up five principal lodges with the aim of spreading their cause far and wide. The cause was to overthrow the Qing dynasty and restore the Ming dynasty. They encouraged people to join their 'Hong family' or 'Hong gate'. The character *hong* was selected as it was the second character in the name of the traditional founder of the society, Zhu Hongying. Zhu was the family name of the emperors of the Ming dynasty, but people with this surname had long been under the suspicion and surveillance of the Qing court for being Ming loyalists, and it would have been dangerous to use that name. The character *hong* was also very convenient: it shares the same pronunciation as the Chinese word for the colour red, offering possibilities for colour symbolism, and, more significantly, it is the first character of the first reign period of the first emperor of the Ming dynasty, the Hongwu reign period (1368-1398). The first emperor of the Ming dynasty, Zhu Yuanzhang, is the perfect hero for a peasant rebellion: born into a peasant family, he herded cows as a young man, then joined a Buddhist monastery and spent some years as a monk. He was known popularly as 'the beggar king' and succeeded in throwing the foreign Mongol authority out of south China and taking the northern capital, now Beijing, in the same year. An uneducated peasant, if not drawn by the legendary history of the society, might well be inspired by Zhu Yuanzhang to join his brothers and swear loyalty to a secret nationalist Movement, aiming to oust another foreign Manchu authority and restore Chinese self-rule.

<sup>3</sup> Cai Shaoqing, 'Guanyu Tiandi hui de qiyuan wenti', *Beijing Damie Xuehao* 1964. 1.

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The character *hong* is also significant in that it can be broken down into component parts, which are themselves Chinese numerals, and play a very important role in the rituals of the Heaven and Earth Society.<sup>4</sup>

To join a branch organization of the Heaven and Earth Society, a new member had to undergo the initiation ceremony of the larger Heaven and, Earth Society. This involved paying an entrance fee and taking part in an elaborate dialogue with the ritual masters. It was mostly in verse form and much of it in symbolic code.<sup>5</sup> Although details of the initiation ceremony vary between the different published accounts of the Heaven and Earth Society, the basic ritual of the ceremony remains the same. The new member had to pay his dues to receive a diploma or certificate of membership and to pay for aspects of the ceremony. The numbers of the total amount paid and the breakdown cost for each item are all significant in numerological terms. For example, Schlegel's account<sup>6</sup> gives the entrance fee as 600 copper cash, of which 360 paid for making the clothes (i.e. the book with the laws), 108 paid for the purse (i.e. the diploma or certificate), 72 paid for instruction (i.e. the oaths), 36 paid for the decapitation of the traitorous subject (i.e. the white cock), and 21 paid for the five coloured fruits in the Taiping market. This left just 3 cash, which were exchanged for the 3 special 'Hong cash' to be carried by the new member as a sign of membership. All the numbers here are divisible by three, which is a fundamental number in the Heaven and Earth Society, standing for the three aspects of the Triad: Heaven, Earth and Man.<sup>7</sup>

However, there is little evidence to show whether the three Hong cash were usually real coins, as illustrated in the photograph of ritual objects in Ward and Stirling,<sup>8</sup> or whether they were important only symbolically.

<sup>4</sup> For an interesting discussion of a recently discovered Heaven and Earth Society piece with the character *hong* in the inscription, see Tu Yanzhi, 'Tiandi hui 'Hongwu tianxia taiping' qian de faxian yu chazheng', *Zhongguo Qianbi* 1992.4. pp. 41-4.

<sup>5</sup> Only details relating to coins and membership certificates are mentioned here. Full detail, of the rituals can be found in G. Schlegel, *The Hung League* (Batavia, 1866); J. S. M. Ward and W.G. Stirling, *The Hung Society or the Society of Heaven on Earth, vol. I* (London, 1925); W. P. Morgan, *Triad Societies in Hong Kong*, 2nd edn (Hong Kong, 1982); Wynne, *Triad and Tabut*, Accounts in English mostly concern Chinese communities overseas living in territories under European colonial rule, particularly in Southeast Asia and Hong Kong. Publications from the USA which deal with the history of Chinese communities there, particularly in California, mention secret societies in passing. In the past few years there has been a growing number of publications from the PR China, giving details of secret society activities before the Communist takeover in 1949: some are general introductions, some cover archive materials, and some reproduce Chinese material in the British Library.

<sup>6</sup> Schlegel, *The Hung League*, pp. 148-9.

<sup>7</sup> Ward and Stirling, *The Hung Society*, p. 88, explains the importance of the three Hong cash and the frequent use of the multiple 3 x 7 following one Chinese sub-division of man as having three souls and seven sets of faculties, relating to the energy of the limbs and the senses.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 24 and 148.

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Ward and Stirling also illustrate a secret society diploma with the three cash drawn down the right hand side.<sup>9</sup> Stanton illustrates three coins with the different inscriptions: *Hongwu tongbao*, *Honglong tongbao* and *Hongying tongbao*, and says that they may be made from metal or cardboard. Stanton also gives the weights of these pieces: 'The first of these must be five mace five candareens in weight, the second nine mace nine candareens, and the third three mace three candareens.'<sup>10</sup> Schlegel also gives an outline sketch of a *Hongying tongbao*.<sup>11</sup> Morgan's account of secret society activities in Hong Kong illustrates the three cash torn out of paper, and adds that the technique of tearing out the three cash also formed part of the ritual. It would seem that the three Hong cash were vital elements of the ritual, but that symbolic representations could adequately replace actual coins.

Apart from paying for the five coloured fruits in the Taiping market, there is another important mention of money in the ritual. When the initiate arrives at the Two-plank Bridge, he finds two vertical banners and the long cash. The banners read: At the Two-plank Bridge hang the long cash, the character *hong* will tell you how many coins make up the long cash: three thousand, eight hundred and twenty one. The long cash are '...pieces of paper in which are cut notched slashes, each notch representing a cash or cent. These leaves are so torn that they form narrow strips from one to four feet'.<sup>12</sup> In this way, the long cash represented long strings of cash coins.

Symbolic money is also mentioned in the rules of the Society: 'every brother (i.e. member) going out should have with him a copy of the seal as a diploma, three Hong cash, the red-floss thread and a white fan'.<sup>13</sup> Article 8 of the 36 Oaths reads: '...When brethren travel to and fro they have a badge as recognition. If they have not found, either in the morning or at night, a place to rest or pass the night, you ought to receive them, and not feign not to recognize them ...'<sup>14</sup> Article 21 reads: 'After having entered the Hong league, you shall not secretly show the statutes and diploma of the lodge to strangers, for they are the most important things of the Hong league. He who covetously sells them secretly to others, is the one who has forgotten his duties and perjured his oath ... If it is discovered, both his ears will be cut off, he shall be punished with 108 blows and be cast out of the brotherhood'.<sup>15</sup>

In addition to the diplomas and Hong cash there are also codewords and standard phrases whereby strangers may reveal themselves as members. For example, if asked the multiple of 3 x 8 a member would give the answer 21, thereby completing the four numerals which make up the written character *hong*.<sup>16</sup> If a member is asked how much his parents left him, he should

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 138.

<sup>10</sup> W. Stanton, *The Triad Society, or Heaven and Earth Association* (Hong Kong, 1900), p. 90.

<sup>11</sup> Schlegel, *The Hung League*, p. 219.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 86, n. 4. The long cash are illustrated in Tab.xvi. <sup>13</sup> Ibid., pp. 218-19.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 140.

<sup>16</sup> Ward and Stirling, *The Hung Society*, p. 88.

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answer: 'Father and Mother left me three cash; within the world we are united in a body...'. This refers a member to the name of the society, as in the ritual there is reference to the father as heaven and mother as earth.<sup>17</sup> There is also a short ritual appropriate when a member wishes to spend a night at an inn.

*Innkeeper*

'The Hong gate opens like the character *ba*,  
If you've no money we don't want you to enter.'

*Member*

'Three hundred and twenty one  
Without money, have yet to eat...'<sup>18</sup>

These references are taken from accounts given in Schlegel and in Ward and Stirling, which are based on activities by the Chinese communities in Southeast Asia.

There is a gold presentation piece in the British Museum collection which is clearly from the Heaven and Earth Society (**Pl. 21, 1**).<sup>19</sup> This unique piece is octagonal in form, weighs 5.49 g and measures 21.5 mm in diameter. On both sides the outer rim is raised, as is the rim around the central square hole. The characters are in relief and the flan space between the characters is marked so that they stand out. There is a small letter 'J' stamped on the upper rim on the obverse; it is probably a hallmark. The shape of the piece is symbolic, suggesting both the eight trigrams and the Chinese phrase *si mian ba fang* (four faces eight directions), where the outer rim has eight sides and the square hole four. The obverse inscription *Hongying tongbao* (t-b-r-1) is the standard inscription found on the three Hong cash. The reverse inscription is more complicated. At first glance it may look like a four character inscription (t-b-r-1) ending with *san wen* (three cash), but the top and bottom characters are intended to be intelligible only to the initiated. They are both composite characters: the top character is made up of four elements representing four different characters and the bottom character is made up of four recognizable characters joined together. The four elements of the top character read clockwise *chuan da ding shou* (valley, big, man, head), although this has no meaning until the 'acronym' is expanded to read *shun tian xing dao* (Obey Heaven and follow the Way), one of the commonest Heaven and Earth Society slogans.



<sup>17</sup> Schlegel, *The Hung League*, p. 134.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 170-- 1, here *ba* (=8) and 321 make up the character *hong*.

<sup>19</sup> BM 1983-10-17-14.

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The bottom character comprises four characters, *zhong xin yi qi* (faithful in heart, loyal in spirit), a phrase also found in the Heaven and Earth Society rituals such as in the wine-cup ritual when, after exchanging ritual secret signs and words, the person offered the wine-cup must say the phrase *zhong xin yi qi*.<sup>20</sup>



By concentrating these phrases into composite characters, the society was writing in a secret code thereby making them more potent. The characters *san wen* cannot refer to an ordinary denomination, as the gold content of this piece is far greater than that of three standard one cash coins. The character *san* can also be read *can* meaning to join, and *wen* can also be interpreted as writing thereby indicating a document of membership. Either way, the inscription is clearly intended to refer to the three Hong cash of membership. The gold content and the quality of this piece suggest that it may have been made for presentation.

There are a number of nineteenth-century brass coins with strange inscriptions that have previously been attributed to the Taiping rebels. Ma Dingxiang offers alternative explanations for these coins and attributes them to the Heaven and Earth Society.<sup>21</sup> Previously the coins were put together so that the first two characters of each coin inscription followed by the single characters on the reverse would read successively *Taiping-Kaiyuan-Tianchao* meaning 'the Taipings inaugurate the emperor of the new Heavenly dynasty, may our literary and military affairs be sacred forever'.

The *Kaiyuan tongbao* (a Tang dynasty coin inscription) with the single character *wu* above the hole or to the right of the hole on the reverse, has been found mostly in Zhejiang province. Ma suggests that the character *yuan* refers to Zhu Yuan, the first emperor of the Ming dynasty (full name: Zhu Yuanzhang). *Wu* would then refer to the Hongwu reign period of Zhu Yuanzhang. The *Taiping tongbao* (a Northern Song coin inscription) with the single character *wen* on the reverse, was made by Liu Lichuan, leader of the Shanghai Small Sword Society. The name Taiping is found in the Heaven and Earth Society rituals, for example in the Taiping Market, and the home of the founder of the Heaven and Earth Society, Zhu Hongying, was in Taiping county in the Taiping prefecture. *Wen* then refers to the Jianwen reign period of the second emperor of the Ming dynasty, Zhu Yunwen.

<sup>20</sup> Schlegel, *The Hung League*, p. 204.

<sup>21</sup> Ma Dingxiang and Ma Chuande, *Taiping Tianguo Qianbi* (Shanghai, 1983), pp. 200-6.

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The *Tianchao tongbao* with the single character *yong* on the reverse may have been used by the Heaven and Earth Society in the guise of the Taiping rebel as *Tianchao* (Heavenly Dynasty) was the name the Taiping rebels gave their rule. Moreover, the character *tian* contains the character *da* 'great', and the character *chao* contains the character *ming*. These join to form *da ming*, the great Ming [dynasty]. *Yong* then refers to the Yongle reign period of the third Ming emperor, Zhu Di. The *Huangdi tongbao* with the single character *sheng* on the reverse has previously been thought of as a Taiping coin, however, Hong Xiuquan was adamant that as there was only one God in Heaven, only He could have the Chinese title *huangdi* (emperor), and he is unlikely to have authorized such an inscription. For the Heaven and Earth Society, however, the *huangdi* would of course refer to the emperors of the great Ming dynasty. Although the character *sheng* is found on Taiping documents, it is also often found on documents of the Heaven and Earth Society.

Another brass coin has an obverse inscription *Huangdi tongbao*, but reverse inscription *bao zhe* (Zhejiang Mint) in the Manchu script. The same reverse inscription is found on coins of the Shanghai Small Sword Society which suggests they may be coins of the Heaven and Earth Society.

Ma also illustrates a *Huangdi zhongbao* with the reverse inscription *bao dang shi* (Zhejiang Mint worth -10) and a large brass mint inauguration piece weighing 600 g which has the inscription *Taiping tianguo*, reverse *shengbao*. The reverse shows the eight trigrams around the coin.

In addition to membership tokens made in the form of coins, membership certificates or diplomas were made in the form of Chinese traditional paper money, for issue to new recruits during the initiation ceremony. These were made from cloth or paper and copy exactly the form of traditional Chinese paper money: they are rectangular, tall rather than wide, and have a printed envelope-shaped outline on the front. The standard text of the note is also printed; the name of the issuer and the place-name are printed in the horizontal box at the top, and the remaining text is written vertically beneath. Spaces are left blank to be filled in with the name of the recipient and the date. The completed diploma is then stamped in red ink with the seals of the society, as indeed traditional paper money was over stamped with the seals of the banks. The purpose of making the diplomas resemble bank notes was to make them less conspicuous.

Only one such diploma is recorded as having been found in mainland China. It was discovered in 1978 and is now in the Shanghai Museum collection. It was issued by the *Zhongling tang* (*Zhongling Lodge*) and was made from bamboo cloth, a fabric known to have been in frequent use about 1864. The inscription was wood-block printed in indigo ink and additions were written by hand. It measures 22.5 cm by 11.5 cm.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> This diploma is discussed in Ma and Ma, p. 209; Wu Chouzhong and Jin Cheng, (continued>)

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A greater number of specimens have been recorded from Chinese communities overseas.<sup>23</sup> According to the Taiping historian, Liu Shanqing, The younger brother of the Eastern king, in the seventh month of 1864, changed clothes and escaped out of the fallen city of Huzhou with a foreigner He went to Shanghai, then Hong Kong, and from there he emigrated to San Francisco. After selling his jewels he got more than 100,000 dollars. Using this fortune, he started the Three United Society (*San he hid*), a secret society aiming to rebuild the Taipings.... Through this society, he supported many Chinese who came to America.<sup>24</sup> In the mid-nineteenth century there was a substantial movement of Chinese people around the world: anyone connected with the Taiping Rebellion faced persecution after its defeat, great numbers headed for California in search of gold, and others emigrated to Southeast Asia where the tin mining industry was developing. Many of the new immigrants joined societies in order to survive.

The British Museum has one diploma in its collection, in the name of the *Yixing gongsi*, which bears the characteristics of diplomas issued by the Heaven and Earth Society (Pl. 20).<sup>25</sup> It was devised to look like an ordinary banknote issued by a private bank so as not to attract attention. This certificate of membership was issued by the Patriotic Rising Society in San Francisco (also known as the Chee Kung Tong), which was founded in the early 1860s. By the 1880s Heaven and Earth Society organizations were active in most major American cities, some of which adopted the name of Hongshun Tong/Tang (Hall of Obedience to the Hong).<sup>26</sup> The following numbers refer to the inscriptions on the British Museum diploma; their positions are shown in Fig. 1. The inscription is given in pinyin, followed by a translation and explanation.

1- 4     *Jin shan zheng bu* - 'San Francisco Chapter'  
(1-2 translate literally as Gold Mountain, the Chinese name for San Francisco, where great numbers of Chinese emigrated during the gold rush of the mid-nineteenth century. 3-4 translate literally as 'main town'.)

5 - 8     *Yi xing gong si* - 'The Patriotic Rising Society'<sup>27</sup>

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'Tiandihui "Zhongling tang" wu liang bubi chutan', *Wenwu* 1981.12, pp. 54 - 5; and Wang Songlin, 'Tiandi hui "Zhongling tang" huizheng de kaoju', *Zhongguo Qianbi*, 1985.1, pp. 18-19.

<sup>23</sup> Examples of secret society diplomas and seals have been described by Schlegel, Ward and Stirling, Stanton, and in passing by Wynne. These have already been published, with illustrations and explanations, and are not dealt with here.

<sup>24</sup> Henry Shih-Shan Tsai, *The Chinese Experience in America* (Indiana. 1986), p. 52.

<sup>25</sup> BM 1979-10-39-20.

<sup>26</sup> Tsai, *The Chinese Experience*, p. 53.

<sup>27</sup> Huang Benquan in his unofficial history *Xiaolin Xiaoshi* records that in the eighth month (I' the third year of the Xianfeng reign period, the Small Sword Society put up posters announcing the *Daming Taiping Tianguo* (Great Ming Taiping Heavenly Kingdom), calling themselves *Shuntion Yixing gongsi*. In Shen Yunlong (ed.), *Taiping jun - Xiaodao hui luan Hu shiliao* (Shanghai, 19th cent.), p. 3.

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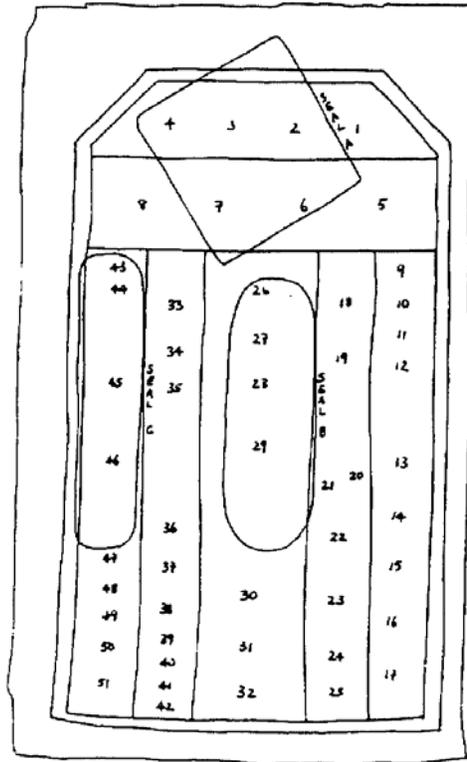


FIG.1. Position of the inscriptions on the British Museum diploma.

(Gongsi usually translates as 'company' but was adopted by the secret societies to avoid attention.)

9-12 *pin piao shou dao* - 'this note is a receipt for'  
(This is a standard expression found on membership diplomas.)

13 *X yi* - 'X' town,  
(The name or the town would usually be written in the space above this character.)

14-17 *zu zhu fan gui* - 'keep back the foreign devils'  
(The first stroke of 16 and the last two strokes of 17 are missing. This is intentional. In Chinese folk practice it was not unusual for characters to be written incompletely, although still recognizable, as this was a certain way of confusing the spirits.)

18 *gong tong he he* - 'united together in peace'  
(This is a complex character of the type also seen on the gold presentation piece of the Heaven and Earth Society.)

19 *Chen* - the personal name Chen

20-1 *er bu* - 'Sacramento Sub-chapter'  
(20-21 translate literally as 'second town'.)

22 *Chen* - the personal name Chen

23 *Yang* - the personal name Yang

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- 24 – 5      *jing shou* - 'through the hands of [ ... ]'  
(This is a standard expression found on membership diplomas.)
- 26 - 8      *guan di yin* - 'funds for the lodge'  
(26 was used by the secret societies to describe a meeting place or lodge.  
26-8 is a standard phrase found on many secret society certificates.)
- 29          *liu* – 'six'  
(This character can also be read *lu* - 'rainland'.)
- 30 – 2      *da yuan zheng* – 'large dollars only'
- 33          *jie wan wei ji* - 'unite in tens of thousands and make a mark'  
(This is a composite character made of four individual characters of the  
type also found on the gold presentation piece above.)
- 34 -5      (as 20 - 21) *er bu* - 'Sacramento Sub-chapter'
- 36 -7      *zi hao* – 'serial number'
- 38 - 42     *san bai er shi yi* - 'three hundred and twenty one'  
(The numerals here are written in long hand, but when written in  
shorthand they combine to form the character *hong*.)
- 43 -7      *Tian yun X nian X yue X ri* - 'on the Xth day of the Xth month of the Xth  
year of the Tianyun period'  
(This was the standard Chinese way of writing the date, but the numerals  
for the day, month and year have been left blank intentionally, so that 46  
and 47 are next to one another, able to form easily the character Ming. 43  
and 44 may be translated as the 'Mandate of Heaven'.)
- 48 -50     *Hong shun tang* - 'Hong shun Lodge' (Hall of Obedience to the Hong)
- 51          *piao* - 'certificate'
- (Seal A)     illegible
- (Seal B)     *Hong shun tang* - Hongshun Lodge (Hall of Obedience to the Hong)
- (Seal C)     illegible, followed by *Zhi gong tang* - Zhigong Lodge (Chee Kung Tang  
Patriotic Rising Society, San Francisco)

Although the inscriptions on different diplomas cover the same basic themes and often include standard phrases, such as *guan di yin*, there are some differences in the expressions used. A further two notes, also previously unpublished, are interesting in this respect.<sup>28</sup>The first is from San Francisco (Figs 2 and 3):

- 1- 4          *Zhao qing en kai* - 'Zhao Qing [prefecture], Enping [county], Kaiping  
[county]' (Enping County and Kaiping County were in Zhaoqing  
prefecture in Guangdong Province.)
- 5 - 9          *He ju guan di piao* - 'The United Offices - Funds for the Lodge'
- 10 -11        *Jin shan* - 'San Francisco'
- 12 -13        *Dabu* - 'Main town'
- 14 -16        *Ci shou dao* - 'This is a receipt for'
- 17-25        *Zhao fu Kai ping xiang Li yu tang xiang* - 'from Liyutang, Kaiping county  
in Zhao[qing] fu' (19 - 20 and 22 - 24 are handwritten.)

<sup>28</sup> Both are in a private collection. I am grateful to Bob Wang for supplying photocopies of these and for his help in reading them.

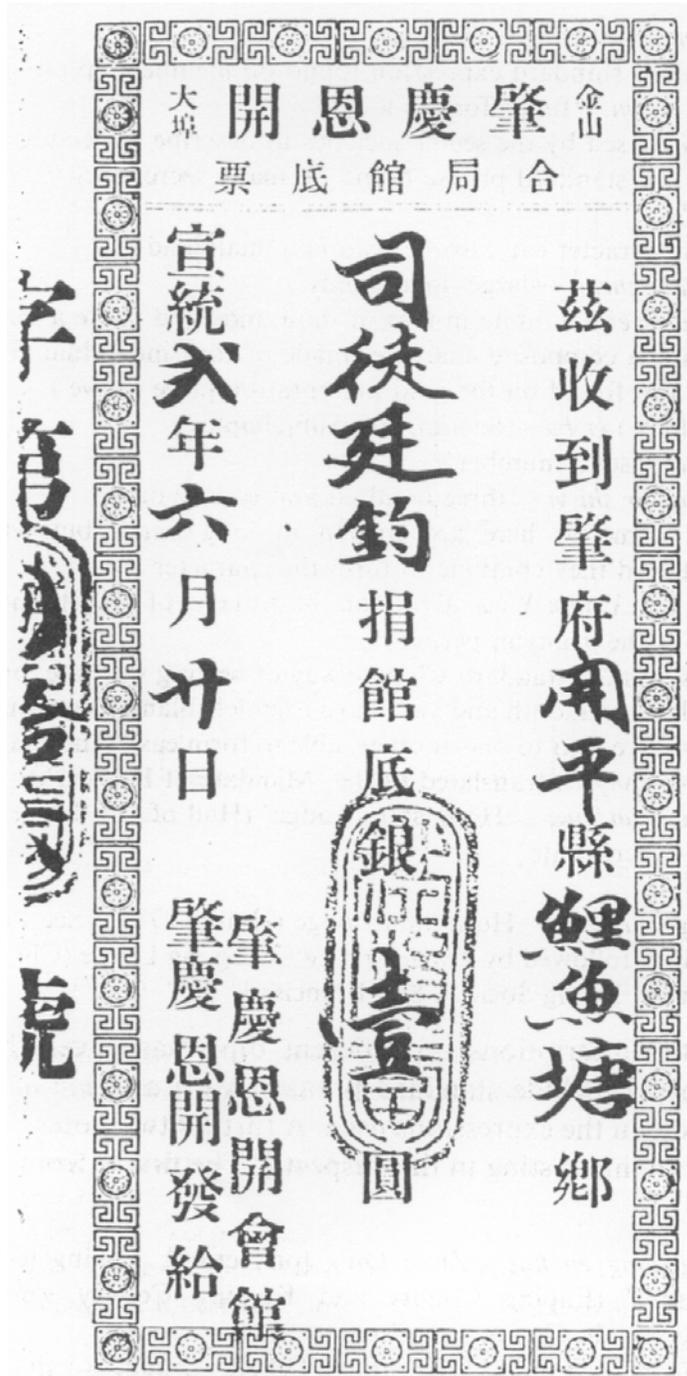


FIG. 2. The San Francisco Diploma

- 26 – 9      *Si tu Tang jun* – the personal name Situ Tingjun  
                  (26 – 29 are hand written)
- 30 – 5      *juan guan di yin yi yuan* – ‘has contributed 1 dollar in funds for the lodge’  
                  (34 is handwritten)

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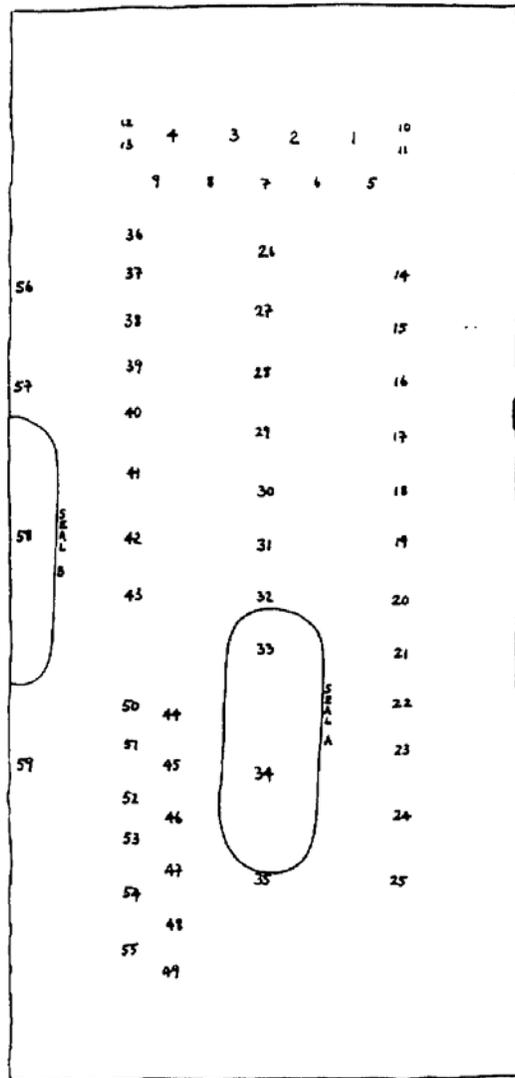


FIG. 3. Position of the inscriptions on the San Francisco diploma.

- 36-43 *Xuan tong er nian liu yue er shi ri* - '20th day of the 6th month of the 2nd year of the Xuantong reign period' (i.e. 1911. The numerals of the date are handwritten.)
- 44-9 *Zhao qing en kai hui guan* - 'The Zhaoqing, Enping and Kaiping Benevolent Association' (45-46 refers to an association where the members are all from the same county or province.)
- 50-5 *Zhao qing en kai fa gei* - 'issued by Zhaoqing, Enping and Kaiping'
- 56-7 *zi di* - 'serial number'
- 58 (Handwritten numerals. Illegible. Only part of the numerals is visible; the other part remained on a counterfoil in the book from which it was taken.)

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- 59                    *hao* -'number'  
(Seal A)            *Hong shun tang* – 'Hall of Obedience to the Hong'  
(Seal B)            *Hong shun tang* – 'Hall of Obedience to the Hong'  
(Only half of this seal is visible; the other half remained on a counterfoil in the book from which it was taken.)

The second of the diplomas is from Canada (Figs 4 and 5) and reads:

- 1-3                    *Feng cai tang* - 'Fengcai Lodge'<sup>29</sup>  
4-8                    *Tang di piao shou tiao* - 'Receipt for funds for the Lodge'  
9-11                   *Jia na da* -'Canada'  
12-14                  *Wei duo li* – 'Victoria'  
15-17                  *Ci shou dao* - 'This is a receipt for'  
18-22                  *Tai ' yi He zui cun* - 'Hezui Village in Tai Town'  
(18 and 20-21 are handwritten.)  
23-5                   *Chao Tian jun* - 'Mr Chao Tian'  
(23-24 are handwritten.)  
26-32                  *Xi juan tang di yin wu yuan* - voluntarily contributed 5 dollars in funds for the lodge'  
(32 translates literally as 'member', but is homophonous with the character *Yuan* for 'dollar'.)  
33-8                   *ling jia juan yin 0 yuan* - 'and contributed an additional 0 dollars'  
(37 is handwritten.)  
39-59                  *fan wo kun zhong lu jia zhe ru wei you tang di piao yi lu xu Yao ren juan wei ju* - 'any of our brothers who has travelled to Canada and who does not have a diploma must make a contribution as proof [of membership]'  
60-4                   *jing shou ren Bao Qiu* – 'through the hands of Bao Qiu'  
(64-65 are handwritten)  
65-76                  *Zhong hua min guo shi liu nian jiu yue yi ri fa* -'issued on the first day of the ninth month of the sixteenth year of the Republic of China' (i.e. 1927.)  
(The numerals in the date are handwritten.)  
77                      *zi* - 'serial number'  
78                      (Handwritten numerals. Illegible. Only part of the numerals is visible; the other part remained on a counterfoil in the book from which it was taken.)  
79                      *hao* -'number'  
(Seal A)              illegible

The gold presentation piece and the diplomas described above have all been seen outside mainland China. It is difficult to estimate how similar the rituals and other activities on the mainland and overseas may have been, given that a large amount of evidence from the mainland has probably been destroyed during the last century of war and revolution. Nonetheless, there

<sup>29</sup> The Fengcai Lodge of the Yi clan is known to have had disputes with other groups in Canada in 1909. See Liu Boji, *Meiguo huaqiao yishi* (Taipei, 1984), pp. 621- 3.

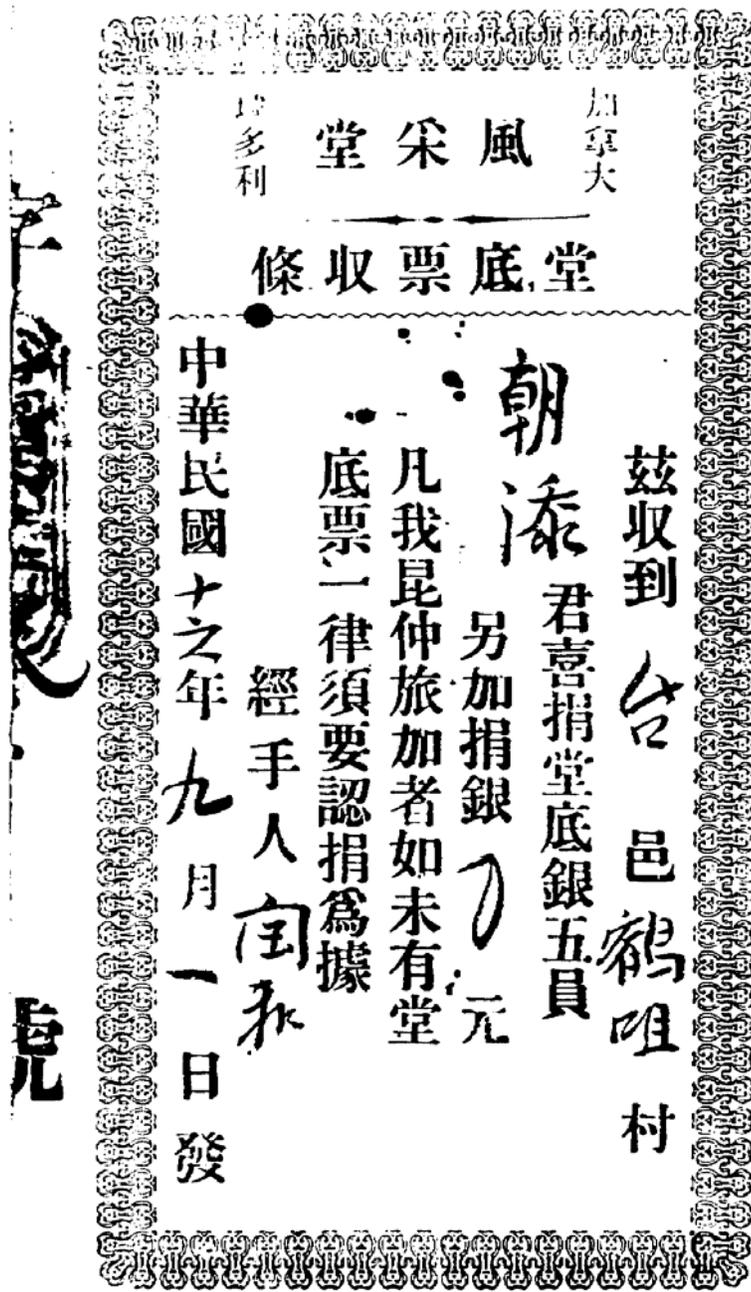


FIG. 4. The Canadian diploma

is clear evidence that coins and membership tokens were issued by the secret societies on the mainland.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>30</sup> The late Ma Dingxiang was the first numismatist to look in detail at the coins and membership tokens of Chinese secret societies, and I have relied heavily on his catalogue; Ma and Ma, *Tai ping Tianguo Qianbi*. A revised ed. of this catalog is being prepared by Ma Chuande, but I have not seen a copy.

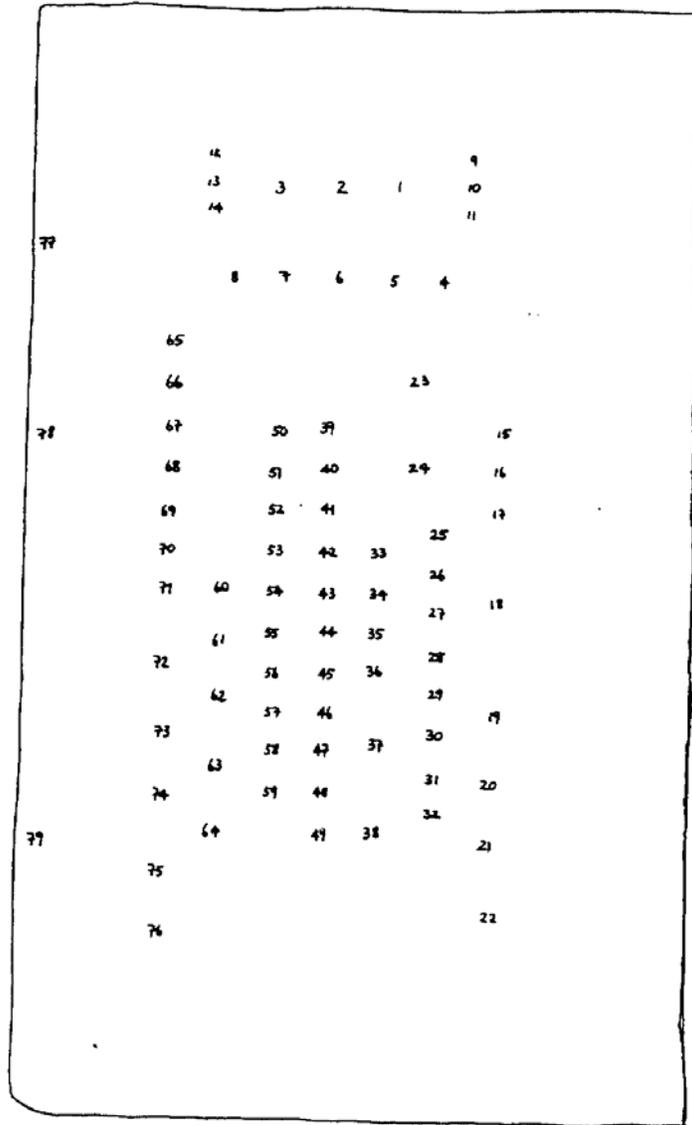


FIG. 5. Position of inscriptions on the Canadian diploma.

THE GOLDEN COIN SOCIETY

The Golden Coin Society was a branch of the Heaven and Earth Society, established in the south of Zhejiang province in 1858 by eight people from the town of Qiancang in Pingyang county. The name of the society may have its origins in the particular form of membership badge worn by the eight founder members, which was made from two *Kangxi tongbao* coins fixed back to back and threaded through

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with red silk. By fixing them back to back the Manchu inscriptions on the reverse were obscured, and only the Chinese side was shown, which symbolized the aim of the society to overthrow the Manchu government and restore the Ming rule. The coin inscription itself is significant, as it was during the Kangxi period that the Heaven and Earth Society was traditionally founded.

Later the society began to melt down brass coins that were in circulation and recast them as membership badges. Most of these badges have been found in the area encompassing southeast Zhejiang and northeast Fujian provinces, where the Golden Coin Society was active. Little was known about the badges until the early 1940s when over 30 examples were discovered during the dredging of the Baishi River in Pingyang county.<sup>31</sup>

The membership tokens share the same obverse inscriptions, but have different reverse inscriptions. The four-character inscription on the obverse has been read in two ways: *Jin qian yi ji* (r-l-t-b) (Golden Coin mark of loyalty) and *Yi Ji jin qian* (t-b-r-l) (mark of loyalty - a golden coin).<sup>32</sup> The only peculiarity in the calligraphy is found in the character *jin*. This character is usually written with the first two strokes making up the element *ren* (person). Here, the first two strokes make up the element *ru* (center). As the character *jin* is not normally written in this way, and in the strictest terms would be regarded as incorrect, it is clear that the *ru* is significant and was used to show admission to the society. The character *jin* is written in this way on all the Golden Coin Society badges except for the large coins with the character *li* (to part) on the reverse, where it is written in its usual form with the element *ren*.

Five different types of reverse are known for the Golden Coin badges:

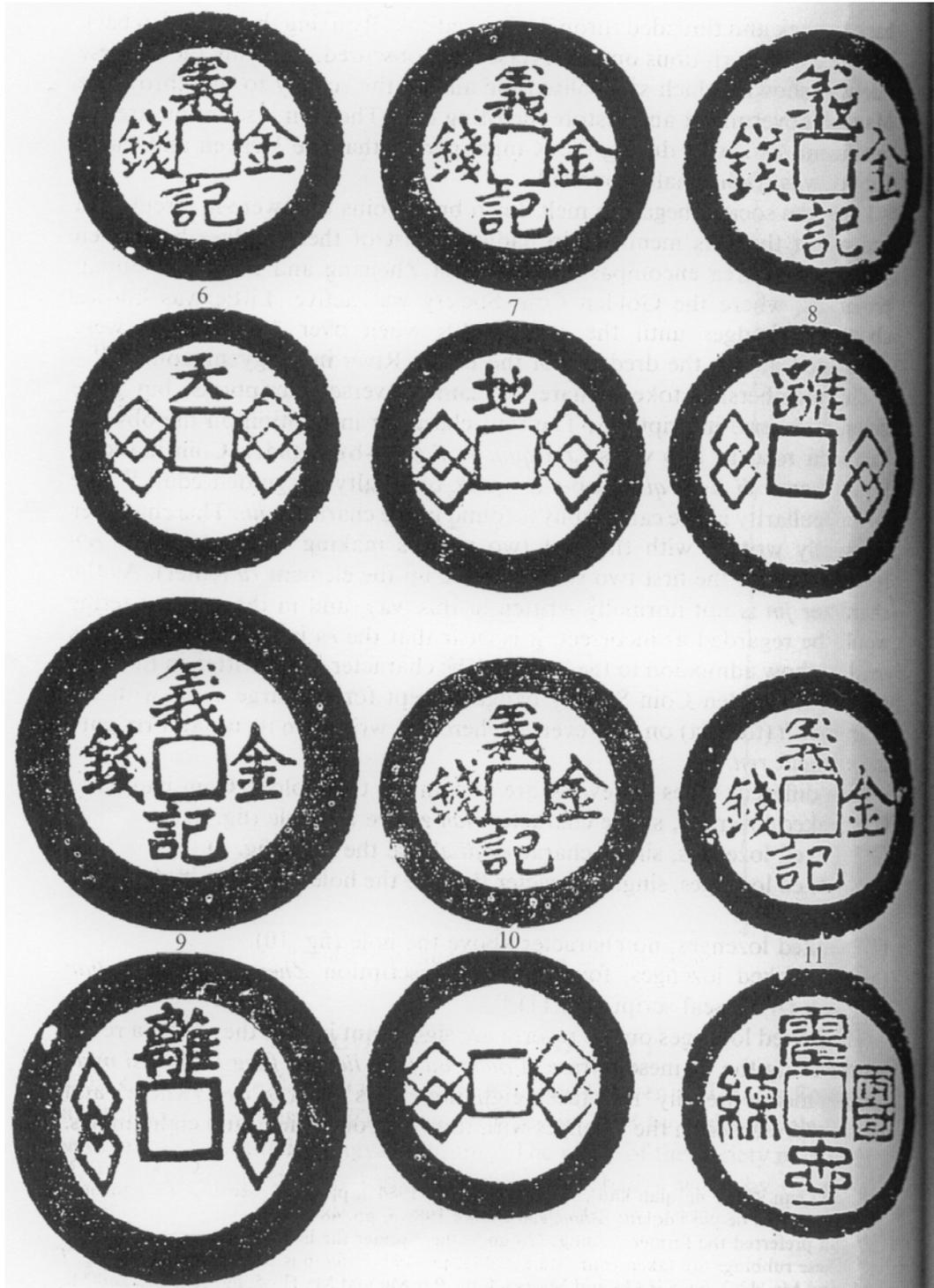
- (1) linked lozenges, single character *tian* above the hole (fig. 6).
- (2) linked lozenges, single character *di* above the hole (fig. 7).
- (3) linked lozenges, single character *li* above the hole (small fig. 8; large fig. 9).
- (4) linked lozenges, no character above the hole (fig. 10).
- (5) no linked lozenges, four-character inscription *Zhen zhong tuan lian* (t-b-r-l) in seal script (fig.11).<sup>33</sup>

The linked lozenges on the reverse are significant in that they form a rebus presenting the Chinese phrase *si mian ba fang lian jie fang sheng*. *Si mian ba fang* means literally 'four faces, eight directions', that is 'everywhere', and this is represented in the lozenges with four unbroken sides and eight angles.

<sup>31</sup> Gu Qian, 'Yi ji jin qian kao', *Zhongguo Qianbi* 1984.2, pp. 31-6. See also Yu Jianchun, 'Wo suo zhidao de yiji jinqian' *Zhongguo Qianhi* 1987.3, pp. 49-50.

<sup>32</sup> Ma preferred the former reading; Gu and others prefer the latter.

<sup>33</sup> These rubbings are taken from Ma and Ma, pp. 193- 5: fig. 6 is Ma and Ma H3-1, fig. 7 is Ma and Ma H3-2, fig. 8 is Ma and Ma H3-4, fig. 9 is Ma and Ma H3-5, fig.10 is Ma and Ma 3 -7, fig.11 is Ma and Ma H3-3.



FIGS 6 – 11. Badges of the Golden Coin Society

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*Lianjie fang sheng*, literally means 'joined linked lozenges' but has the double meaning 'victory only in unity'.

The single characters *tian* and *di* above the hole on the reverse are the characters making up the name of the Heaven and Earth Society and they are the first two elements represented in the eight trigrams (*bagua*). This ties in neatly with the eight founder members of the society, and Ma suggests that society's members were arranged into eight teams corresponding to the eight trigrams.<sup>34</sup> The character *li* is the fourth of the eight trigrams. Ma suggests that these pieces may have been made as badges after the founder members had parted, and offers a quote from Zhao Qi, the leader of the society: 'When the day comes for us to part, we should make something to commemorate the occasion'.<sup>35</sup> It could be that the larger *li* coins were the first coins cast by the society, and were made as pendants for the leaders of the society, and not as badges for ordinary members. This might explain why the character *jin* on these coins is written in the usual way with the character *ren* and not with the character *ru*.

There are several varieties of membership badges with linked lozenges on the reverse but with no single character above the hole. Ma suggests that those similar to the coins with the character *tian*, *di* or *li* on the reverse came from the second casting of that type, and that those which are clearly from different moulds, were mass-produced later to meet the demand by new members.<sup>36</sup>

Only one example is known with the reverse inscription *Zhen zhong tuan lian*; it appeared on the market in Shanghai in 1957.<sup>37</sup> The inscription reads literally: 'earthquake, loyalty, militia'. The character *zhen* is represented by the fifth of the eight trigrams. The character *zhong* ('fidelity') is similar in meaning to the character *yi* ('loyalty') in the obverse inscription. *Tuanlian* were local defence associations. Ma writes that this piece was probably made in 1862 after the Golden Coin Society's armed uprising on 2 August 1861.<sup>38</sup>

In 1862 Zhao Qi received a request from Zhai Huaiben, the commander of Pingyang county, asking him to join the society to his *tuanlian*. Zhao Qi obliged, seeing this as an opportunity to take advantage of the conflicts between the local officials and the gentry to openly carry out society activities under the guise of the *tuanlian* and thereby augment the power of the society. However, Zhai's request was itself a ruse. He had earlier received a request from Sun Jiangming of Rui'an county, who also had a *tuanlian* and the support of the local land-owners and gentry, to help suppress the Golden

<sup>34</sup> Ma and Ma, p. 191.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 191.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 191.

<sup>37</sup> Gu, 'Yi ji jin qian kao', p. 32. See also Zheng Jiayang, 'Pingyang Jinqian hui yu Tiantai Jinqian hui de xin qian', *Wenwu* 1959.12, pp. 35-6, 40.

<sup>38</sup> For a history of the Small Sword Society see Zhou Yumin and Shaoyong, *Zhongguo banghui shi* (Shanghai, 1993), pp. 171 - 81 (Fujian), and pp. 187-200 (Shanghai).

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Coin Society during the temporary retreat of the Taiping armies from the area. Zhao Qi and others joined Zhai's *tuanlian* and arranged their troops in groups of a hundred with a 'protector' at the head of each troop, in charge of training. It may be that one *tuanlian* coin was issued to each 'protector'. The Society was defeated in 1862.<sup>39</sup>

Although the eight trigrams would appear to be important on these badges, only four of them can be identified on the coins of the Golden Coin Society. It may be that the other four trigrams were also used, but have not survived, or it may be that the four that were used were simply chosen for their symbolic presence.

### THE SMALL SWORD SOCIETY

The Small Sword Society, another branch of the Heaven and Earth was active in Taiwan, Fujian, and Shanghai. The Fujian Small Sword Society was established in Xiamen in 1849 and later spread to Shanghai. Liu Lichuan, the elected leader of the society, was also a member of the Guangdong Heaven and Earth Society.

The aim of the society was the same as that of all branches of the Heaven and Earth societies, which was to overthrow the Qing and restore the Ming. During their uprising on 7 September 1853, when they seized Shanghai, the Small Sword Society used the name *Dachengguo* for their new territory and the name *Tianyun* (Movement of Heaven, or Mandate of Heaven) as their reign period. They started to make coins in July 1854 in response to the shortage of cash in Shanghai at the time. The coins were intended for circulation, and most have been found in the Shanghai region.

The Small Sword Society, like the Golden Coin Society, was keen to let people associate them with the Taiping rebels. In order to make this association even more persuasive they used the inscription *Taiping tongbao* on their coins, an inscription that was never used by the Taipings themselves.<sup>40</sup> The Small Sword Society also put the character *ming* (Pl. 21, 2) or a dot and crescent on the reverse (Pl. 21, 3) of these coins. These marks are known in Chinese as the sun and moon marks respectively. The character *ming* is made up from the two characters *ri* (sun) and *yue* (moon). In this way the character *ming* and the dot and crescent share the same significance, and imply the slogan of the Heaven and Earth Society: 'Overthrow the Qing and restore the Ming'.

However, these coins were conspicuous. Huang Benquan's unofficial history of the period reads: 'The town was rich in gold and silver but was

<sup>39</sup> Gu's article surveys the research that has been done on these membership badges and looks at the historical sources for the Golden Coin Society.

<sup>40</sup> Taiping coins have the inscription *Taiping sheng bao* (literally 'sacred treasure of the Taipings'). The Taiping Rebellion is also known as the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom.

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short of coin. Fifty liang of *kubao* silver ingots were exchanged for scrap copper which was cast into 200,000 coins with the obverse inscription *Taiping tongbao* and a sun and moon on the reverse. When the traitors came into the town to trade they had to undergo official/military inspection. Those in possession of such coins were sent for trial and a number had been killed. Realising that these coins could not be used, the rebels made their coins look more like the Xianfeng cash.<sup>41</sup>

The coins that were 'like the Xianfeng cash' are probably the Small Sword Society coins which have the Manchu inscription, *baoyun* (Yunnan Mint), on the reverse, and were intended for circulation alongside the officially issued Xianfeng coins with a Manchu inscription.

There is also evidence that the Small Sword Society made some coins that were intended for presentation rather than circulation. In the British Museum collection there is a unique silver example issued by the Small Sword Society, weighing 18.30 g (PI. 21, 4).<sup>42</sup> The obverse inscription reads (t-b-r-l) *Taiping tianguo* (Taiping Heavenly Kingdom), and the reverse reads (t-b-r-l) *tong li zheng jiao* (literally: unite, reason, administrate, educate). The piece is well-made and has been engraved by hand. The characters are neatly carved in outline in a fluent style, and the flan space between the characters has been marked to give depth behind the characters so they stand out. Although the obverse inscription reads *Taiping tianguo*, it was not issued by the Taiping government in Nanjing. On almost all the Taiping coins the character *guo* (kingdom) is written with the element *wang* (king) within the square, because Hong Xiuquan believed that a kingdom should be governed by a king. However, this piece bears the character *guo* in its original full form, with the element *huo* (land) within the square. The reverse inscription *tong li cheng jiao* was a phrase used by Liu Lichuan and Chen Yalin, leaders of the Shanghai Small Sword Society, to attract new recruits

There is one piece of evidence relating to this coin inscription, documented by a contemporary scholar, Zhang Dejian, in 1853. It reads: 'When I was working for foreigners in Shanghai, the foreigners would sometimes take the steamship to Jiangning. The rebels had left behind copper coins, and so the foreigners in Shanghai often had some. I once saw dozens of coins with the inscription *Taiping tianguo* on the front and *Tong li zheng jiao* on the back, looking as good as the official coins. The copper was quite red, the workmanship was very good, quite similar to the style of the Taihe [Taihoa] and Jingtong [Canh Thong] coins of Annam, but yet they were quite different.<sup>44</sup> Ma was sceptical about the existence of such copper coins, but the silver example in the British Museum suggests that Zhang's account was well founded.

<sup>41</sup> Ma and Ma, p. 178, n. 2 quotes from the section on the Taiping Tianguo, in *Zhongguo Jindaishi ziliao congkan*, vol. VI, p. 549.

<sup>42</sup> BM 1868-2-5-1.

<sup>43</sup> Ma and Ma, P. 2, also p. 177, fn. 1.

<sup>44</sup> Quoted by Ma and Ma, p. 1, taken from Taiping Tianguo, *Zhongguo jindai shi ziliao congkwn*, vol. III.

COINS AND TOKENS ISSUED BY OTHER SECRET SOCIETIES

In his catalogue Ma also attributes a number of coins to the Guangdong Three Dot Society (or Triad) (*Sanhe hui*), which was led by Chen Kai and Li Wenmao, also under the umbrella organization of the Heaven and Earth Society.<sup>45</sup> These include coins with the inscription *Mingdao tongbao* (t-b-r-l) and the single character *tian* on the reverse. Two types of brass coin with this inscription are known. One of these (Ma and Ma H2-2) has a mismatched reverse identical to some of the coins with the inscription *Pingjing you ying*. They are also similar in fabric, size and calligraphy, and Ma suggests they were cast at about the same time.

The inscription on this coin is reminiscent of the Song dynasty coin *Mingdao yuanbao* (t-r-b-l) issued by the Renzong emperor. However, the Guangdong Three Dot Society coins are dissimilar in fabric, in the use of *tongbao* rather than *yuanbao*, and in the placing of the characters in the inscription. The use of this inscription is important: *Mingdao* can translate as 'the Way of Ming' and so refer to the Ming dynasty. Two key slogans of the Heaven and Earth Society also include the character *dao*: *Shun tian xingdao* 'Obey Heaven and follow the Way' and *Titian xingdao* 'Act on behalf of Heaven and follow the Way'. As on the Golden Coin Society badges, the character *tian* on the reverse may be interpreted as the first character of the name of the society or as the first of the eight trigrams.

Ma also re-examines coins with the inscriptions *Pingjing tongbao* and *Pingjing shengbao*, found in Guangzhou, Guangxi, Kaifeng, and Chaozhou, and described variously as commemorative coins, membership tokens, or Taiping coins. When Li Wenmao, leader of the Guangdong Three Dot Society, occupied Liuzhou in Guangxi in March 1857, he declared himself king, calling himself the Pingjing king and his state the Dachengguo. He also issued *Pingjing* coins which were in circulation for only a short time as he was defeated the following year. The *Pingjing tongbao* coins are the size of a standard one cash coin, whereas the *Pingjing shengbao* are slightly larger, were worth five cash, and were used by the army. In the inscription on these coins, *Pingjing* refers to Li Wenmao's title, and the character *sheng* is found in the names of lodges of the Heaven and Earth Society.

Ma suggests that *Sitong tongbao* coins were also secret society coins, Sitong being the reign name of Liu Yishun (= Zhang Baoshan) who in 1860 organized a peasant rebellion in Guizhou and declared himself a descendant of the Hongwu emperor.

<sup>45</sup> Ma and Ma, p. 181.

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In reassessing these coins and tokens, Ma was breaking new ground. Previously these coins had been regarded, even by Ding Fubao, as having been issued by the Taiping rebels. Recent advances in the study of the history of this period offer much new evidence, but still the situation remains obscure. The current interest in China in these pieces and the publications that are emerging about the secret societies should lead to a more detailed study of the history of the secret societies and of their coins and membership tokens.

APPENDIX

Chinese Characters Appearing on the Coins and Membership Tokens with the pinyin form.

ba	八
bagua	八卦
can	參
Dacheng guo	大成國
guo (containing huo)	國
guo (containing wang)	國
hong	紅
Honglong tongbao	紅龍通寶
Hongwu tongbao	紅武通寶
Hongying tongbao	紅英通寶
Huangdi tongbao (rev: bao zhe)	皇帝通寶 (皇浙)
Huangdi tongbao (rev: bao zhe dang shi)	皇帝通寶 (皇浙當十)
Huangdi tongbao (rev: sheng)	皇帝通寶 (聖)
Jin qian yi ji (jin with character ren)	金錢義記 (金)
Jin qian yi ji (jin with character ru)	金錢義記 (金)
Jin qian yi ji (rev: di)	金錢義記 (地)
Jin qian yi ji (rev: li)	金錢義記 (離)
Jin qian yi ji (rev: tian)	金錢義記 (天)
Taiping-kaiyuan-Tianchao-huangdi-wen-wu-yong-sheng	太平開元天朝 皇帝文武永聖

APPENDIX – Continued

Kaiyuan tongbao (rev: wu)	開元通寶 (武)
Kangxi tongbao	康熙通寶
kubao	庫寶
Mingdao tongbao	明道通寶
Mingdao yuanbao	明道元寶
Pingjing shengbao	平靖勝寶
Pingjing tongbao	平靖通寶
Sanhe hui	三合會
Shuntian xingdao	順天行道
Simian bafang lianjie fang sheng	四面八方 聯結方勝
Sitong tongbao	嗣統通寶
Taiping shengbao	太平聖寶
Taiping tianguo (rev: sheng bao)	太平天國 (聖寶)
Taiping tongbao (rev: bao yun)	太平通寶 (身身)
Taiping tongbao (rev: dot=ri, crescent=yue, ri + yue = ming)	太平通寶 (日+月 = 明)
Taiping tianguo (rev: tong li zheng jiao)	太平天國 (統理政教)
Taiping tongbao (rev: wen)	太平通寶 (文)
Tianchao tongbao (rev: yong)	天朝通寶 (永)
Tianchao (showing Daming)	天朝 (大明)
Tiandi hui	天地會
Titian xingdao	替天行道
Yixing gongsi	義興公司
Zhenzhong tuanlian	震忠團練
Zhongling tang	鐘靈堂
zhongxin yiqi	忠心義氣

The British Museum diploma

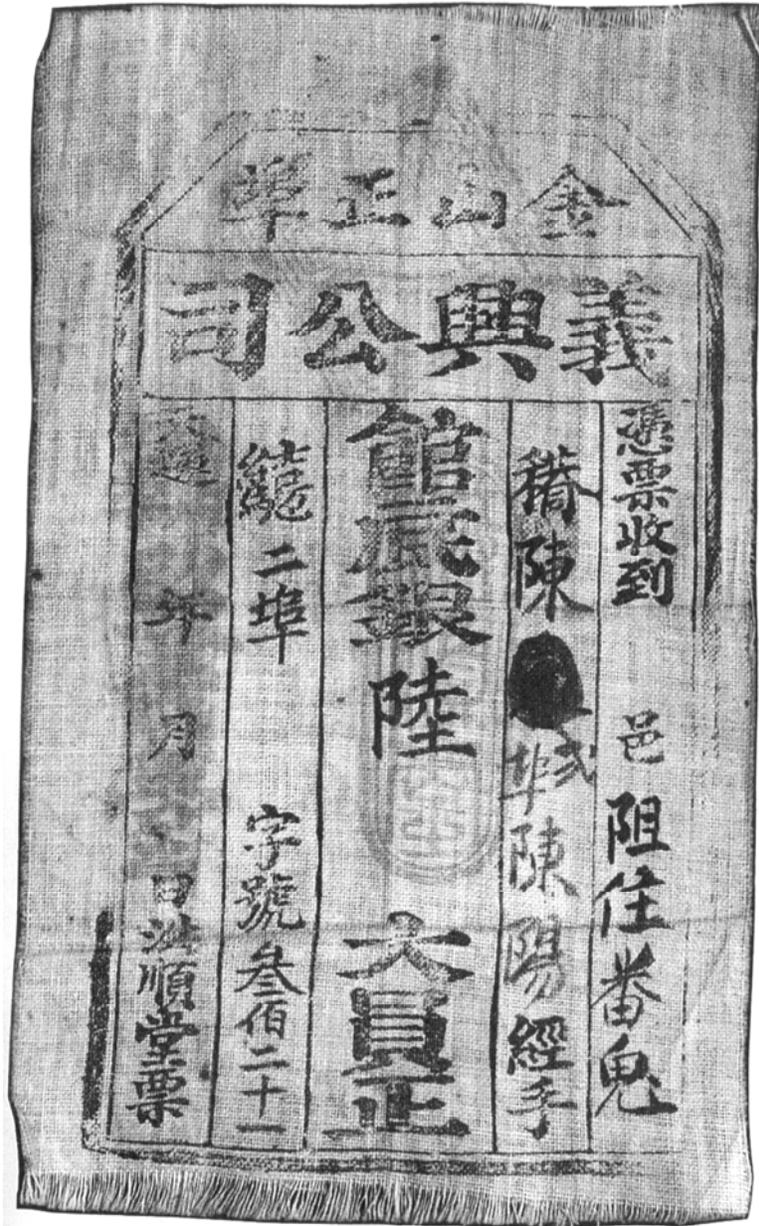


PLATE 21

Coins referred to in H. Wang – Heaven and Earth Society



1



2



3



4

